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## SOME MASTERPIECES OF ART.

## II.

THE visitor enters that softly-lighted, fresh, tranquil Belvidere of the Vatican—that happy shrine of the three or four *greatest* great works in Rome. There, selected from thousands, stand the gleaming, wonderful marbles of yellow-white, about which he has heard since his infancy—the Apollo of the Belvidere, the Laocoön, the Antinous of the Vatican, and some modern, effeminate work of Canova's. The figures rise in the embrasures of a cool, arched chamber, like a portico, alternating with niches that are the frames of exquisite window-views—away from the throng of vulgar museum-trophies—critically looking at each other, as it were, to see if the preference of ages still stands the test of time. Compared with the common herd of antiques in the Braccia Nuovo or other parts of the Vatican, facing each other in the perspective of their double rows, these statues of the élite seem like the three or four loveliest belles whom you find at a party—after the long parlors are past—grouped together in the choice silk-curtained boudoir that is best of all. If the Apollo is the most beautiful, the Laocoön is the most wonderful. In the terrible difficulties calmly overcome, the harmony of grouping and line that is forced upon a rebellious, troubled theme, it still remains the unapproached masterpiece of antiquity. It is art of an advanced, com-



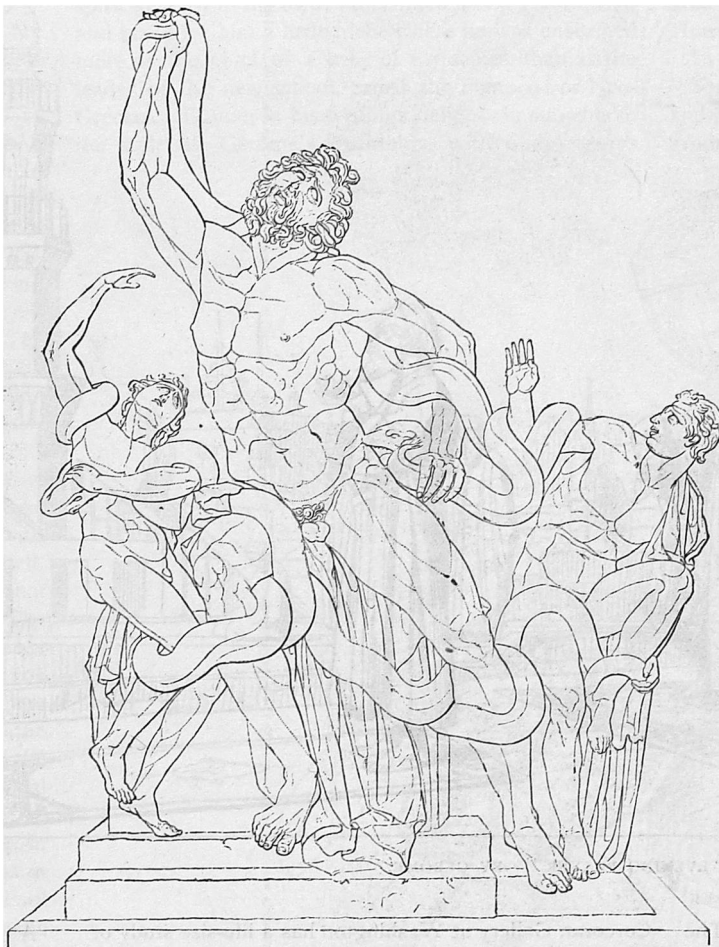
VENUS DE MEDICI.

licated civilization. We no longer have the separate, individually strong figures of the Ægina temple—no longer the lovely individualities of the Parthenon pediment, separately faultless, but planted along the cornice as a row of divided objects, noted as a grouped historical tableau. Instead of this individuality, this concatenation, which belongs to the earlier experiments of statuary, we behold a group arranged so that its members shall advance into the light or retreat into shade, and compose a masterpiece of chiaroscuro, the hollows filled with festoons of trailing

drapery, or daring graces of twisted snakes. It is art of a romantic period, not simply art of a single-hearted religious period. You pause and wonder, and are instructed. You think on the great minds it has inspired. You remember how Michael Angelo adored it, how Titian scoffed and caricatured it as a group of apes, how Byron wrote of "Laocoön's agony dignifying pain," and Lessing of its capacity to illustrate the difference between the art treatment and literary treatment of a theme. And then you recite some lines of Matthew Arnold's exquisite Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön. Stormy beauty, agony turned into poetry, have filled your soul. And then, as you feel yourself saturated with impressions of sublimity shed over you from a far-away past, you recollect that this is not after all art of the most perfect period, and that even the Torso of the Belvidere, close by, leaves it far behind, to say nothing of the Elgin marbles. What could that mighty civilization have been, that produced, in a period of comparative decline, and away off on a provincial island, the work that awes you now, as if it were alive?

The Laocoön was sculptured in Rhodes by Agesander and his two sons, about the time of the Toro Farnese—some time between the epoch of Alexander and the Roman Conquest of Greece—that is to say, when liberty and civilization were powerful in the fair Isle of Roses, and a romantic school of art undertook a free untrammelled treatment of literary themes. A wealthy proconsul brings the splendid group to Rome after the Greek defeat. Did Virgil see it, and, in his minute verse describing the death scene of the priest of Neptune, did he pay a tacit tribute to Agesander as creator of his idea? One likes to think so, for it would be one of the very few cases where poetry has taken its theme from a work of art.

Cleomenes' statue of the Venus of Medici is the pride of Florence. There in the small room of selected works, called the tribune of the Uffizi gallery, you behold the criterion piece, by which all other beauty is judged. It is supposed, from the Greek marble in which it is carved, and from the name of the sculptor, to have been prepared in Greece, and even in Athens, during that transient revival of the arts which took place shortly before the capture of Corinth by Mummius. The arms, of course, are modern—it being impossible that mem-



THE LAOCOÖN.

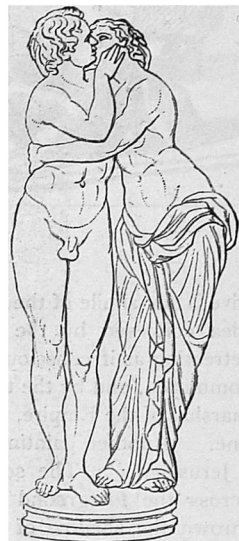
bers so freely detached from the trunk of stone should have survived their long burial and tardy resurrection. The fate of most antiques, in fact, has been to submit to some mutilation, and what is worse, some restoration. Of the Laocoön just mentioned, the right arm is modern, and another arm, prepared by another restorer of the Renaissance period, lies alongside on the floor in a different position or gesture. Meanwhile you are told by some critics that the head shows the marks of the fingers, showing that originally Laocoön was wringing his hair in his agony, and still other authorities assure you that the real head of the Laocoön is in Duke D'Arenberg's palace in Brussels. The armlet above the elbow of the Venus belongs to the antique part of the statue, and is a somewhat singular feature in a treatment otherwise completely conceived in the nude and the undecorated. The Dolphin simply stands for the sea, beside which Venus rises in the wild glory of her recent birth, while upon it play the winged forms of the two cupids, Eros and Anteros, the holy love and the sense love which Venus equally controls in the breadth of her all-subduing empire.

In the graceful group of "Cupid and Psyche" we have a romance of the later non-religious period of antiquity. The personification of the soul as a divinity would hardly have occurred to the old Greeks, but Apuleius, who lived a little after Virgil, took advantage of the taste of his time for the arbitrary construction of myths. Intelligent people no longer wor-

shipped any of the old gods, except as a piece of policy before the populace; so the invention of new ones was nothing but a venial and expert exercise. Thus about the time that Christianity was growing up in the East, the legend of Psyche was taking form in Italy, and crystallizing in the gilded lines of Apuleius' *Ass of Gold*. The marble group in question, found on the Aventine and preserved in the Capitol at Rome, may have been ordered of the carver by some rich citizen of the Mæcenas kind, who had been delighted by hearing

Apuleius read his fanciful lines. It is certainly not of an older period. In its elegant construction the thought of grace predominates over every thing. It would seem difficult, at the first blush, to make two figures embrace without turning the back of one of them to the eye; but the sculptor, with consummate ingenuity, shows both these fair, flexible young bodies in front. The pretty ardor of Cupid, holding Psyche's head fast with both hands to kiss her the better, is as boyish and innocent as possible. Psyche, her feet a little clogged with the draperies, stands with less freedom, with more of a precocious womanliness. The whole, without a trace of the old religious austerity, is a standard of romantic art as conceived by the Augustan age of Rome.

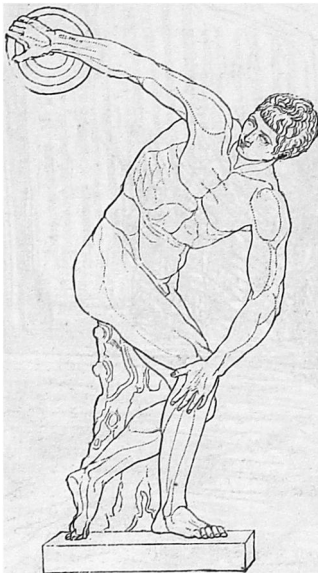
When you have the luck next to meet with a cast of Myron's Discobolus (everybody may see one, for instance, at the New York Aquarium), go immediately behind it. You get there a lively idea of the intense propulsive force expressed. The quoit-thrower's form is seen to be writhing all over with the curves and tensions of muscular power; his figure takes the twist of a turning screw, and you comprehend that he is projecting the missile with a feeling like the uncoiling of a spring. In the back view, too, the dragging of the left foot, which complicates



CUPID AND PSYCHE.

the front aspect a little, is very beautiful, and assists the idea of pushing forward. The bending of the toes under this foot has always been much admired, for it is one of the earliest specimens in art of an intense and almost ungraceful "realism." Few antiques can be so certainly assigned to a date as this.

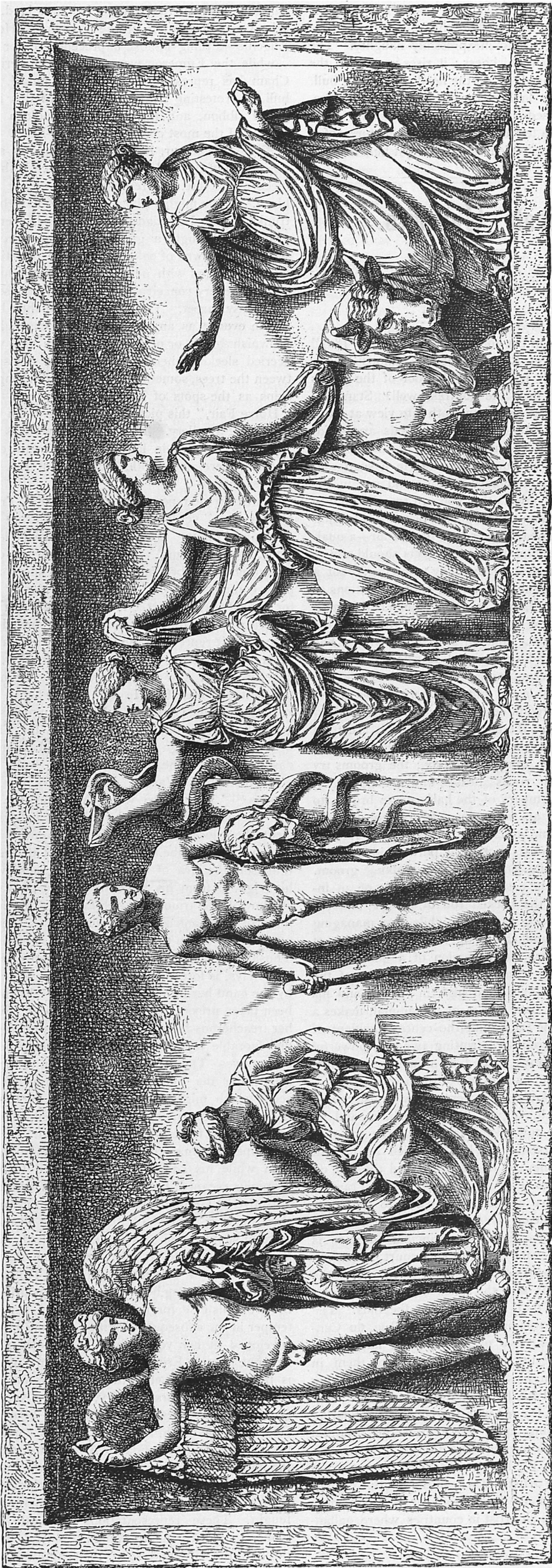
The marble in the Hall of the Biga, in the Vatican, bears the name "Myron," carved on the trunk of the tree beside the figure. This shows that the Vatican replica is a copy of that famous bronze of Myron of which the ancient writers speak. Myron was born about 430 B.C., in Bœotia, and all his more celebrated works were in bronze. The marble repetitions of this figure are therefore all copies, but admirably skilful ones. By simple collation among the "repliche" of which this statue furnishes a greater number than any other antique, we get, besides a lively idea of what a singular favorite it was among the Romans, a competent notion of the exact spirit of Myron's original bronze. The signed replica of the Vatican was formed in 1761 at Adrian's Villa, and its arm, right leg, and head are restored. But the head is antique in the more celebrated (but unsigned) copy to be found in the Massimo palace, Rome, and from that we derive a correct idea of the excellence of Myron in this all-important part. "Myron excelled in heads, as Praxiteles in arms and Polyclethus in the breast," said the ancients. The Massimo Discobolus was found in 1761 upon the Esquiline, near the ruined "Nymphæum" known as the Trophies of Marius. When the Vatican copy was discovered thirty years later with its attribution to Myron, the antiquarians knew how to designate the earlier and less mutilated example. The signing of the Discobolus shows how little faith is to be placed on the signatures often found upon antique marbles. Pliny complains of this in his time. Here was a statue which made no pretense of being an original, coolly signed with the name of the real author of the conception. So, when we see the name of Cleomenes on the Medici



THE DISCOBOLUS.



THE TORLONIA MUSEUM.



JASON AND MEDEA.

FACSIMILE OF A DRAWING BY NICCOLA SANESI, FROM THE MARBLE IN THE TORLONIA MUSEUM.

Venus, that of Agesander (with Polydorus and Athenodorus) on the Laocoön, that of Myron on the Discobolus, that of Agasias on the Fighting Gladiator, or that of Apollonius on the Torso Belvidere, we are almost as much in the dark as ever. We find the names of Greek sculptors freely signed in letters that are of a later period, than that in which the artists lived; and we see a name unblushingly looking out from a marble that we know, to be an original, should be a bronze. The copies in stone, which the Romans so loved for their palaces, are to be regarded as the *publication* of the bronze. The names on them are no more to be taken an autographic than the name of Tennyson on the back of a book of poetry is to be taken for his signature. The Romans simply, when they liked a fine Greek bronze, printed off an addition of it in marble, of so many copies. In our time the bronze, being intrinsically valuable, has disappeared into coinage, while the stone cheap edition remains. Besides the Vatican and Massimo copies, there are other ancient ones in the Capitoline and British museums. Myron was celebrated as an animalist also. His Cow was brought from Athens after the conquest, and placed in the Temple of Peace in Rome—a wondrous bit of imitation surely, and worth the care of its journey into Italy for, even as the grapes of Xeuxis deceived birds, so the cow of Myron is claimed to have deceived the sturdy masters of the herds.

EDWARD STRAHAN.

## THE TORLONIA MUSEUM.

THERE is no private collection of sculpture in the world so wonderful as that contained in Prince Torlonia's now famous museum, in the Via delle Scuderie beside the Corsini palace at Rome. This museum is not open to the public. Probably not a dozen persons outside the Prince's art-council have had the good fortune to visit it. One of the favored few has given a most interesting account of this remarkable gallery and its jealously guarded art treasures, in a recent number of Blackwood's Magazine. A little garden of superb roses and oranges, says this writer, surrounds the building, which is divided into galleries and subdivided into cabinets by partitions or curtains of cloth of a warm red-brown color. There are five hundred and twenty pieces in all—statues, busts and vases. Not the least striking of these is the magnificent group of Jason and Medea, to which we devote a full-page illustration.

This bas-relief is a part of a slab representing the principal events of the expedition of the Argonauts, who, as every school-boy knows, started from Argos, under the leadership of Jason, to win the "Golden Fleece" and the treasures of Colchis. The stone may have formed a part of the decoration of the building erected by Agrippa, which the people called the "Portico of the Argonauts."

The section is divided into three groups, one of which is incomplete, and probably was the centre of the composition. This is the portion of the engraving nearest the bottom of the page. Hymen with open wings assumes the aspect of a funereal divinity, and the daughter of Æthis seems brooding over her terrible project. Medea is seated in her apartment, which is suggested by the large veil through which the nuptial bed is indicated by the four statuettes which decorate it. Next stands Jason holding the poisonous draught prepared by the fair sorceress, with which he is to kill the serpent, which, twined around the tree, guards the golden fleece. Two women, whose attitudes and countenances are indicative of terror, standing on either side of a bull, complete this splendid piece of sculpture. It was found in 1828 while excavations were being made in the town of the Quintili—now Roma Vecchia.

The most remarkable statue in the Torlonia Museum is the Minerva, which came from the Prince's excavations at Porto where it adorned Trajan's palace. This Minerva, which has never been seen by the public, stands in a sort of sanctuary with full-sized casts of the Vatican and Capitoline Minervas facing her. These alone are considered her fitting companions—for the claim is that she surpasses those famous representations of the most beautiful Phidian type that has come down to us.

The goddess is represented with all the emblems that recall her beneficent acts in favor of humanity according to ancient belief; she wears the ægis, helmet, and shield; at her right is an olive-tree, her gift to the Athenians; on one of its branches a serpent winds horizontally, emblem of wisdom and prudence. The